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Runningwind padded out of the gorse tunnel and started to leap up the ravine, Thornpaw and Mousefur in tow behind him.

"It's such a beautiful day," mewed Thornpaw happily. "The prey should run well,"

"Speaking of which, I wish I'd gotten a bite to eat before we left, I'm starving," complained Mousefur.

"We can catch something on the way to the Thunderpath," promised Runningwind.

Thornpaw frowned at his words. "We should catch something for the elders, too, shouldn't we?"

Runningwind mewed in agreement and sped up to a brisk trot. The warm air and cool breeze sent energy shooting up his paws, and he felt as if he could run all the way to Highstones and back, but he knew he had to keep a steady pace and save his energy in case they were to run into trouble.

Thornpaw took the lead as they went deeper into the forest. "Better get that prey now," Runningwind whispered to Mousefur, as he picked up the succulent scent of squirrel. Mousefur sniffed, dropping into a hunter's crouch. Sliding forward on noiseless paws, she crept into the bush and out of sight of the two toms. A startled squeak and a loud curse to StarClan told them that Mousefur had found the squirrel. A few moments later she came back, holding the fluffy grey squirrel by the tail.

"Share?" she proposed, and all three cats crouched down to take bites of the still-warm prey.

Soon Runningwind and Mousefur had also caught a rabbit, and they scraped earth over it to save it until they could retrieve it later.

Everything was calm as they made their way towards the Thunderpath.

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"Everything looks good here!" Runningwind called, as he finished resetting the last border marker. Mousefur and Thornpaw trotted up to him, having finished their marking also.

"Not so loud you mouse-brain," mewed Mousefur, clouting him on the ear with sheathed claws.

Runningwind hissed playfully, and leapt ahead into the trees, getting a good head start on the others.

"Yes, quiet, you wouldn't want any *enemies* sneaking up now, would you?" Runningwind stiffened as he recognized the voice of Thunderclan's exiled ex-deputy.

"Tigerclaw," he growled, whipping around. Before him stood the massive rouge, along with Blackfoot, and three other cats he did not recognize.

Runningwind didn't know where Mousefur and Thornpaw were, but he didn't want to call out to them. If the rogue cats thought he was alone the other two may be able to take them by surprise. "What are you doing here Tigerclaw?" he demanded. "You were exiled, this is no longer your territory." He narrowed his eyes and unsheathed his claws. "You need to leave."

Tigerclaw let out a small chuckle. "Cute," he growled, "but petty threats cannot stop me. First I will kill your little patrol, then the rest of your precious clanmates," menace gleamed in his eyes. "Get them," he ordered his companions, nodding to where Mousefur and Thornpaw were still catching up. So much for them thinking he was alone

"You will never hurt my clanmates!" Runningwind roared, lunging at Tigerclaw with out-stretched claws. Taken by surprise, Tigerclaw fell back, out of the trees and dangerously close to the Thunderpath. Recovering himself quickly, he jumped sideways just as

Runningwind lunged at him again, swiping his paws out from beneath him and sending him sprawling across the Thunderpath. Panic made his paws tingle as he struggled to catch his breath. The Thunderpath was one of the most dangerous places to fight. Urged on by the distant roar of an approaching monster, he leapt back onto soft ground and deliberately ran past Tigerclaw, just to take the fight away from the deadly black path.

"Come fight you coward!" Tigerclaw hissed, chasing after him.

"Anytime," Runningwind hissed back, turning to lunge at him again. But this time he was too slow, and Tigerclaw butted him in the flank, sending him reeling against a tree. "Stop.... Doing that," he puffed, the breath knocked from his chest again. He only just managed to stagger out of the way, sending Tigerclaw skidding against the leaves, but not without getting his long claws dragged across his muzzle. By now Runningwind could hear his patrol yowling through the bushes. He tried to call out to them, tell them to regroup, but then his legs collapsed as Tigerclaw leapt on him from behind, pinning him to the ground.

"I will kill the cats who betrayed me, one by one. They will never know what was coming, just like you." He growled evilly, leaning down to latch his teeth into his neck.

"Not while I still have breath in my body," Runningwind vowed, turning to snap at Tigerclaw's paw and surging up at the same time, barely sending Tigerclaw's paws off the ground. Turning quick as the wind, Runningwind leapt at Tigerclaw, but the rogue was faster. He dodged out of the way and turned, slicing through Runningwind like prey. With a grunt, he hit the ground, and lay unmoving.

Gasping for breath, Runningwind forced his eyes open to see Tigerclaw stalking away. He tried to move, but his limbs felt as if they were made of stone. Closing his eyes, he let himself fall into the pushing darkness. For a few moments he was floating, between everything and nothing. Then he felt a warm muzzle brush against his flank. Opening his eyes again, he expected to see the same forest he had lived in all his life, with either Tigerclaw or, hopefully, one of his fellow warriors bending over him.

Instead, he saw a lush meadow. A familiar tortoiseshell tom with a distinctive red tail was sitting next to him.

"Welcome, Runningwind, to StarClan's hunting territory." He nodded, and then motioned for Runningwind to stand.

"Redtail!" Runningwind exclaimed. More cats appeared from bushes and tall grass around him, and Runningwind found himself naming them. *Rosetail, Spottedleaf, Lionheart.* All his fallen clanmates had come to welcome him.

"Runningwind! Runningwind!" All the cats of StarClan were chanting his name. He spun around, unable to count all the cats calling to him. A breeze ruffled his ear fur.

"I know you will," he murmured.

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Fireheart padded up to Runningwind. Grief clawed at his heart as he saw the lifeless body. Leaning down, he licked the warrior's pelt. "I will avenge your death," he promised.

A small voice, almost too quiet to hear, spoke. Fireheart shook his head. What had the voice said? Though he had scarcely heard, Fireheart knew what that the voice had said, though he wasn't sure how.

I know you will.